

BY
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NICHOLS.

The Passing Show

All the world a stage, and men and women are the players.—Shakespeare.

Written
Specially for
The Review

And now the Canadian folks come forward and say American newspapers shall not enter their dominion. They refuse only those divine testimonies of the Thaw-White trial. There never has been one whose proceedings were more eagerly sought for. It is suggestive. The great delusions are not published for pastime. True, they are both the framers and the exponents of public opinion. The press is civilization's most mighty engine. But papers are run for revenue. The expert managing editor never lifts his hand from the world's heart. He knows its every throb. He sees the drift of the public mind as though he were looking at it through a powerful X-ray. He spreads the banquet. He waits in silence to see the pabulum that pleases most. From preacher to tramp, the sickening and sordid details have been eagerly devoured. Everybody has read between the lines. Some things could not be printed—but the individual mind demands enough suggestion to supply the missing link. It has run the gamut and is not winded yet. People will have what they want if it is in the market. Editors know the public cravings. They put the stuff on the market—there are buyers by the tens of thousands. This is not to say that the press is vile and distorted. It was never cleaner. Somehow, we rush to a riot of the senses. People come in throngs to the hanging. Somehow, we will around prostrate forms. Drag a body through the street and the crowd will come. There's a weird fascination about a deadly secret flung to the breeze. The higher in society the more furious the frenzy. Don't blame the press. The public rushes pell mell to a hanging.

There never has been an age that did not have its Napoleon of finance. A New York divine put a puzzle to his banquet friends. It happened to be the world's first money-wizard. Noah was wise. He floated a stock company that forced the world into involuntary liquidation. That's the theory. Things have not changed. No man is a financier today unless he knows the art. The secret is to hold the victim by the throat until it bleeds to death. The world has never had such a wizard as Rockefeller, the billionaire. John D. III, is a year old today. When he is fifty years old, far younger than his grandfathers, he will be five times a billionaire. And that only by compounding his inheritance. It is simply dawning. He could pay his nation's debt twice over, and then have millions left. That would probably keep the wolf from the door. We had the gift of \$32,000,000. The income of Rockefeller's holdings is figured at over \$70,000,000 every year. He didn't touch his principal and had over \$40,000,000 left. No man's gift is really great until the sting is felt. It did sting—but it stung the other fellow. The advance in oil came in due time. And now they are fixing

the will. It has leaked out that Uncle John D. is going to give the universe a shock. He is debasing the gift of \$50,000,000 to charity. That's colossal. He'll force christendom yet to change her age-worn creeds. His money is going to be tainted when it talants ours. In the fulness of time we shall all sing the praises of John the Baptist and the saving grace of Standard Oil.

There are some who seem predestined to live below the fog-belt. For that reason, everything they see looks hideous and uncanny. They have no range of vision. The low-hung mists bring no distant horizon. They peer uneasily through the haze. And because of it, nearby things seem so distorted and unnatural. Because one looks at the sun through colored goggles is no sign Old Sol has changed. He might swear to it. That don't mean that anybody believes it. The man who looks at the world through a smoked glass is not authority. To the fellow in the fog everything is spectral. Some writers in these days make one think of that. There are magazines and papers whose range of vision is bounded by the cemetery fence. Some writers can't present a man to the public until they get him turned wrong side out. And they must be dead sure that everything is put back in the grave except the bones. Like scavenger beasts in the streets of the Orient, they are bound to gnaw a bone—green or dry. They need but the cover of the night, the death-bound oath, and the dim flare of lights that give no sign of their secret coverts. These yellow journals remind me of graveyard ghoulies, anyhow. They are forever grubbing among the carcasses of a dead past. They're hunting bones—they must find bones. That is a strange literary ambition that contents itself with being a public scavenger. Some papers are to the public press what scavenger wagons are to a city government. When my number is called I don't want them to hunt for me in a garbage can.

Criticism is given to ludicrous stunts. It often patronizes the thing it condemns. It never fails to be an advertising medium. It unfrocks inconsistencies as nothing else can or will. Nor does it offer fig-leaves for the garments of which it stripped us. Wisconsin is the first to legislate on theatrical attire. The other day one of her venturesome sons dared to introduce a bill. It required that the skirt of an actress shall reach at least four inches below the knees. It came in an age of being defeated. It was a terrible blow at the modern effort to elevate dramatic art. Will another one of these sons now dare to introduce another bill? For instance, one that shall require the skirt to reach at least four inches above the belt, or that the collar shall begin at least within twelve inches of the neck.

But that invades the privileges of the elite and destroys the ocular demonstration of expert massage. That bill never would pass. Another thing reminds me of glaring inconsistencies. Everywhere hands are raised in holy horror over "Salome." Olive Fremstad goes through the dangerous feat of removing, one by one, the seven filmy veils that drape her dreamy form while she dances. It is dangerous—the critics so advertise. And the very next night these whistled protesters rush for reserve seats in the play-house. Oh, fudge! And now, "Salome" is to be so moderated as not to offend their sense of propriety. There are those content if not called to cross the line. They're willing to play the role of a matador. They would love to tease the bull with a big red flag provided they don't get gored. They are quite willing to toy and fumble with any old thing. So they are going to put out the lights now just as the bewitching Salome presses to her breast the severed head of John the Baptist. The lights will go out just as she kisses the gruesome lips. Criticize Salome! Yes! Provided they get seats close under the foot-lights where they can see for themselves. Oh, fudge, I say—fudge! That's the worst ever! Most the kisses are the worse because they are given in the dark. But forsooth we don't see. The rest is alright.

There is society and then there is society. We are face to face with one strata of the Four Hundred sort. It proves to be no more than the phantom march of ghosts. Only the winding sheet is lifted—nothing but hideous bones. Jerome is doing that for some of New York's elite. Many a skeleton has grown restless in the family closet. One can almost hear the muffled clank of the chains that bind him. Suppose your web of life were likewise tangled. Suppose your private life were dragged into the limelight. The horrors of it all! Truly, it is a very dim past, one said: "Without ye are as whitened sepulchers; within ye are full of rottenness and dead men's bones." Men and women tramp our streets imprisoned ghosts, grown brave by years of concealment, at last risk to much. Our smiles hide the deadliest secrets. Sometimes we drop the key—and the spectral thing breaks for freedom. The tragedy—then public shame. Allegiance is a fearful flame. It's like a will-o'-the-wisp. Too often it forakes in the evil hour. There are but few friendships that do not prove to be only fire lights thrown up from the bogs of appetite and passion. Most of the crowd that fling roses at the marriage-fever will lead the mob at the hanging. One needs but to be pursued by sleuth-hounds to discover unending friends. Put your ear close to the average human heart. The sound is like the moaning of a tired and restless sea. It will not hush—it cannot! Hidden boulders tease and

fret its worried waters. What if the curtain were drawn? Is there one whose absolutely real life steps to the front? He who risks it must be pretty sure of his hiding places. We must not curse the one whose skeleton has stalked out into the garish day. In cursing others we may curse ourselves.

For months before and during the trial of Harry Thaw, chorus girls have proffered their testimony to both the defense and the prosecution. That sets me all befuddled. The show girls (and others, not show girls) are so rapid. They do not hesitate to uncover the scarlet letter. They forgot it was hidden only by a filmy drape, anyhow. They talk of the "mirrored room" as if it were no shame to breathe the atmosphere of shame. Proprietries are suspended when there is a chance to be put next. The times call for a daring literary pioneer. Let him call his book "The Jungle." It will not be a commercial gusher that tells the story of dumb brutes on their march to death. It is a tale far more harrowing. It tells of mirrored rooms where the innocents are slaughtered. It will tell of inhuman mothers—accessories to the smothering of virtue's flame. These mothers are blinded by the glitter of gold and the glamor of genius. These are they who drag their daughters down the clutter into gilded palaces whose shadows never lift. "What is needed in my beloved France? Mothers!" shouted Napoleon. Poor Stanford White whispered that wrong lay not in its commission, but in its discovery. A dangerous doctrine—but how far from a commonly accepted fact? We all monkey with the trigger. We all blame the trap if it happens to fall on us. The soft, caressing whisper of the magnetic White checked the ribs of the beautiful and deluded Evelyn. So fits the fire-fly about the flame. Shall we altogether blame the flame? This long, drawn-out trial reveals one thing for sure. Stanford White had his friends—scores of friends. He was not alone in his unbridled life. Dozens were mixed up in that Sodomitic fury. Nor are all the Stanford Whites in New York. We must teach our girls (unimpaired as yet) the meaning of the verse: "Won't you walk into my parlor?" said the spider to the fly. "It's the prettiest little parlor that ever you did spy." But don't be so quick to decide. The most dangerous power in all the world is the ravishing eye—the caressing laughter of the elfish maiden whose beauty is like a fairy dream. Many a poor fellow is wrongfully held responsible for the spec-

acular career of "a pie girl." The girl that goes to "The Dead Rat" chooses to pass through that gate of death. No man is responsible. Her hour strikes when the door opens. Humanity is not driven through places beyond which they certainly know is the slaughter house. I have read somewhere that it is the queen of spiders who spins the silken web. Some of us believe it, anyhow.

An avalanche of Americans move on Europe every year. Millions of our country's gold are dumped on the Continent. It has come to pass that as ocean voyage is only a jaunt. You have but to don your cap and grab your baggage. One starts for London, now-a-days, like he would start up-state out of New York. With some, traveling is a fine art; with others, a fad. You're somebody if perchance your toggery bears the pasted tags of foreign taverns. Luggage must show by all sorts of labels that it has run the gauntlet of the world's custom-houses. It is popular for mothers and daughters to form private touring parties. They go quite alone—and go with perfect ease. The mother has dreamed her dreams. She proposes to do a stunning thing that shall set Paris agog. She is stark wild with the thought that the continent has a corner on royal blood. Of course, her fairest girl has quit her braids and thrown aside her dolls long before their time. She's a flashing, dreamy debutante. That's good! Mama's just got to have a marionette—some puppet for the amusement of the king. Court-juggler, buffoon, or ape—anything, lord, if so be the goal be won! Not so much that the child of her bosom shall be happy in her new-made home, nor that her prize shall be the least above the average in mind and spirit. The secret motive is not the happiness of the child, but the deliberate resolve to buy a place in the family of the king. So they must be off for foreign parts. The father buries himself yet more deeply in financial tides. It is for him to put up the coin. One zone in society is as free as the air of God's great outdoors. These are the born free-men of a realm whose aristocracy are noble thinkers and whose people revel only in the things that are pure and beautiful. The door to another sphere is barred and bolted. The pass-word is a bank account. You literally buy your way in. It is not a question of sense, but dollars. Thereby, hundreds of men and women are living on the verge of mental and moral ruin. Shortage on intellectual and moral worth forces the old man to buy a seat for his women in the kingdom of the mighty. They pose—he grinds. All his blood and nerve-force keeps the mill going. Who cares—so long as his life is covered by a policy! Isn't that what a man's for in these days when homes are boarding houses, wives are petted dolls, and society becomes the arena on which is staged human vapidity in all its utter emptiness. Something is woefully wrong with the social fabric, or else the aspirant is radically deficient. In the high places, men actually buy prestige for their wives and daughters. The most successful in the social world are rarely endowed with tremendous talent. If they were, they would desert this empty sphere for the industrial or the artistic realms. The most of the newly rich belong to that

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happy class who live in the millenium when the plural noun lies down with the singular verb and a little conjunction leads them. They call it study and travel! Pahaw! These ogling mothers are rubbering—they're out on a man-hunt. They pack millions across the seas to buy them "a dook." Anything—oh, anything whose names appear on the musty roster of the crown. They had not the brains to discover royal blood on this side the earth. Men of royal right pass their doors every day at home. The gleams of title and the glare of gold have put out the old lady's eyes. An American youth—honorable, intellectual, aspiring—don't need any crown. He was born a king, crowned already. But these gay old mammites must drag their girls into the world's matrimonial market. They pay no attention to the fact that once an empty carriage drove up to the home of the Goulds; Count Boni and his friends got out.

lamb from the quiet and peaceful vale below. Stanford White presents a paradox in nature. His mind was capable of eagle-flight, for he was a rare genius. But the sluggish blood of the beast was in his veins. He wallowed in the stench and muck of the farthestmost bogs. White had his head in the clouds—his hands in the dirt. Strange—passing strange! The marvel is that one could live for even one brief day in both these extremes at one and the same time. But there was a secret quarrel. Down in Bohemia, a common brawl; in the Ghetto, a fracas; with the millionaires, a "train storm," "emotional insanity." More and more does this tale of Sodom warn us that "Man's greatest happiness can be found only in the peaceful and contented home, where no man can enter except he has the passport, the sign and grip of a gentleman."

Up the Canyon, down the Canyon, help J. E. T. get the franchise. (Adv.)

An Oklahoma man seventy years of age has been sentenced to prison, for ninety-nine years for murder, but of course, he may get the usual commutation time for good behavior.

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A Philadelphia girl is in the hospital afflicted with a dancing mania. The wonder is how she contracted any wonder so lively as that in Philadelphia.

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Up the Canyon, down the Canyon, help J. E. T. get the franchise. (Adv.)

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